

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5672
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IS
SUBJECT: EFFECT ON ELECTION OF LABOR PARTY CHANGES

REF: TEL AVIV 2504

BEGIN SUMMARY: OUR PRELIMINARY JUDGMENT IS THAT
THE SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED CHANGE FROM RABIN TO PERES
IN THE LABOR PARTY LEADERSHIP HAS DONE LITTLE TO HARM
THE ELECTORAL CHANCES OF THE LABOR PARTY AND, FOR A
VARIETY OF REASONS, MAY HAVE SLIGHTLY IMPROVED ITS
PROSPECTS. END SUMMARY.

1. CHARGES AGAINST RABIN. THIS MESSAGE REPRESENTS
OUR FIRST EFFORT TO ASSESS THE LIKELY IMPACT ON THE
MAY 17 ELECTION OF THE RECENT DRAMATIC CHANGE IN THE
LABOR PARTY LEADERSHIP. ANY SUCH ASSESSMENT SHOULD
PERHAPS BEGIN WITH THE COMMENT THAT IN
THE EYES OF MOST ISRAELIS, THE CHARGES AGAINST
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PRIME MINISTER RABIN WERE NOT VERY SERIOUS. THE
FINANCIAL REGULATION UNDER WHICH HE WAS CHARGED
IS ONE WHICH HAD ITS ORIGIN IN THE DAYS OF THE
BRITISH MANDATE AND IS A REGULATION WHICH MANY
ISRAELIS--PROBABLY TENS OF THOUSANDS--VIOLATE
WITHOUT COMPUNCTION. ISRAELIS CONSIDER THE
RABINS TO HAVE BEEN GUILTY OF CARELESSNESS AND

PROCRASTINATION, BUT CERTAINLY DO NOT VIEW THEM AS CRIMINALS. NEVERTHELESS, IT IS WIDELY AGREED THAT NO MAN COULD HAVE CAMPAIGNED FOR THE HIGHEST OFFICE IN THE COUNTRY AFTER HAVING BEEN FINED FOR THIS OFFENSE.

2. A SINGLE LEADER AND A UNITED PARTY. THE COMPETITION BETWEEN RABIN AND PERES FOR THE PARTY LEADERSHIP, WHICH WAS DECIDED IN FEBRUARY BY 41 VOTES, HAD CONTINUED TO HAVE AN EFFECT ON THE PARTY. IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT IN DECIDING THE COMPOSITION OF ANY PARTY STRUCTURE--FROM ITS KNESSET ELECTORAL LIST TO THE SMALLEST BRANCH OFFICE--THE PARTY HAD TO STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN RABIN AND PERES SUPPORTERS. THAT PROBLEM NOW APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED AND PERES WILL LEAD A MORE UNIFIED PARTY. (ALTHOUGH AN ALLON CAMP MAY CRYSTALIZE, THE FACT THAT ALLON DID NOT CHALLENGE PERES SEEMS TO MITIGATE AGAINST A NEW POLARIZATION.) THAT IS NOT TO SAY THAT THE LABOR PARTY DOES NOT CONTINUE TO HAVE ACTIVE COMPETITION AMONG ITS SEVERAL FACTIONS, BUT THERE IS NO DOUBT AS TO WHO THE PARTY'S LEADER IS TO BE. FOR A PERIOD OF SOME 36 HOURS LAST WEEK IT APPEARED POSSIBLE THAT THE ACHDUT AVODAH, UNDER ALLON, WOULD SPLIT FROM THE PARTY AND GO ITS OWN WAY. THAT FACTION HAS NO FIRMLY COMMITTED ITSELF TO REMAINING WITHIN THE PARTY AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF THIS DECISION WILL ITSELF HAVE A CEMENTING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EFFECT.

3. A BETTER CAMPAIGNER. ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT PERES WILL BE A BETTER CAMPAIGNER IN THE WEEKS AHEAD THAN RABIN WOULD HAVE BEEN, AND THE LABOR PARTY WILL PROFIT FROM THIS. PERES HAS A WARMER PUBLIC PERSONALITY, IS A BETTER PUBLIC SPEAKER, AND GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF ENJOYING CROWDS AND SHAKING HANDS. THE PARTY SHOULD BENEFIT IN THE DIFFICULT CAMPAIGN IT FACES FROM HAVING A CONSUMMATE POLITICIAN RATHER THAN A CONVERTED GENERAL AS ITS LEADER.

4. DAMAGE LIMITATION. AN UNFORESEEN POLITICAL BONUS FROM THE LEADERSHIP CHANGE IS THE LIKELIHOOD THAT LABOR WILL BE ABLE TO REDUCE THE LOSSES WHICH IT EXPECTED TO INCUR ON MAY 17. THE PARTY CAN NOW SAY TO VOTERS WHO WERE BEING TEMPTED BY THE DMC WITH ITS CLAIM TO REPRESENT CHANGE THAT THE LABOR PARTY HAS SHOWN

ITSELF CAPABLE OF CHANGING
ITS OWN LEADERSHIP AND THEREFORE WILL BE ABLE TO
BRING ABOUT THE CHANGE WHICH IS DESIRED IN ISRAEL'S
POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SYSTEM. AT THE SAME TIME
PERES' PERSISTENT HAWKISH IMAGE WILL PROBABLY
HOLD A NUMBER OF VOTERS WHO WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE
BEEN TEMPTED TO VOTE FOR THE LIKUD.
MOREOVER, YESTERDAY'S DECISION OF MAPAM TO STAY IN THE
ALIGNMENT (SEPTTEL) SHOULD REDUCE DEFECTIONS
AMONG MORE LEFT-LEANING VOTERS. THUS, THE CHANGE
FROM RABIN TO PERES SHOULD HAVE THE EFFECT OF
ENABLING THE LABOR PARTY TO HOLD ITS OWN AT BOTH
ENDS OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM AND TO MINIMIZE
THE LOSSES WHICH WERE EXPECTED IN EACH DIRECTION.
AGAINST THIS IMPROVEMENT, IN ITS FORTUNES, HOWEVER,
MUST BE BALANCED THE ANTICIPATED DRIFT TO SHELLI,
THE NEW LEFT WING GROUP, OF A NUMBER OF MAPAM VOTERS
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DISILLUSIONED ABOUT MAPAM REMAINING IN THE ALIGNMENT.
OLD CHARGES AGAINST PERES OF BEING INSINCERE AND
OPPORTUNISTIC ARE ALSO LIKELY TO BE RAISED IN THE
CAMPAIGN.

5. CONCLUSION. FOR THESE REASONS, OUR PRELIMINARY
JUDGMENT IS THAT THE LABOR PARTY WILL NOT BE
HARMED BY RABIN'S RESIGNATION. PERES'
OBVIOUS TALENTS AS A POLITICIAN AND, PARADOXICALLY,
HIS IMAGE OF BEING LESS A PART OF THE "ESTABLISHMENT"
THAN RABIN COMBINE TO GIVE THE PARTY AN
APPARENT NET ADVANTAGE. THE PARTY'S SMOOTH
TRANSFER OF POWER ENABLES IT TO MOVE QUICKLY TO
TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE ABOVE FACTORS AS IT ENTERS
THE ACTIVE CAMPAIGN.
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